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ABSTRACT

A two-part study investigated the prevalence of unrehearsed oral reading and compared reading fluency for rehearsed and unrehearsed reading passages. In the first part of the study, a total of 21 teachers were interviewed and 24 classrooms were observed. Results indicated that by far the most prevalent practice in basal reading programs is the "round robin" oral reading approach where children often read in turns from left to right around the table. In the second part of the study, two 9-year-old boys and a kindergarten girl, read aloud a rehearsed and an unrehearsed passage. Results indicated that the subjects read the rehearsed passages more fluently than the unrehearsed passages. Findings suggest that judging children's reading ability based upon how well the child reads unfamiliar text is an inauthentic reading experience and often does not accurately reflect the child's reading skill. (Three tables of data are included.) (RS)

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Rehearsed Oral Reading: Providing Authentic Reading Experiences

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I have an old friend who makes his living as an actor. He's moderately successful in professional theatre and has shared the stage with a number of well-known people. But for all his talent and experience, he is still terrified by auditions. His terror is caused by a lack of confidence in his ability to perform a "cold reading."

Cold reading is a part of the audition process in which actors and actresses perform an unfamiliar scene or monologue. The actor stands alone on a bare stage with the script in hand and reads aloud in front of the director, the producer, and other hopeful actors. My friend is a proficient reader, but when performing a cold reading he stammers, pauses, repeats phrases and asks to begin again. If cold reading were the only audition criterion, one would think my friend had a serious reading problem and very little talent. Fortunately, readers are not often judged solely on their ability to read unfamiliar text aloud in public.

In fact, people who read in public nearly always prepare the reading. Television and radio broadcasters wouldn't dare read the news without first familiarizing themselves with the text. Ministers and lay lectors wouldn't think of trying to read the old testament to a congregation without practicing it first. Politicians, who often do not write their own speeches, are intimately aware of the need for practice.

Yet our perceptions of a child's reading ability are often based principally or exclusively on the child's

fluency while reading unfamiliar text aloud in the presence of peers, teachers or clinicians. That is the nature of basal content reading in many classrooms and of miscue analyses. But unless a child dreams of becoming an actor one day, the experience is, essentially, inauthentic.

An Investigation

I became interested in the prevalence of this practice while working at the Summer Reading Clinic at the University of North Dakota. last summer. Since that time I have interviewed a number of teachers and made note of the practices in classrooms where I supervise student teachers. My inquiry is not quantitative, but in all 21 teachers have been interviewed and 24 classrooms have been observed.

By far the most prevalent practice in basal reading programs is the "round robin" oral reading approach. The three ability group program is still alive and well and children often read in turns from left to right around the table.

One teacher told me she did not use this model. She said, "I don't believe that a child should ever be expected to read something aloud without having a chance to look it over first. She did not use unrehearsed oral reading at all, either in the reading class itself or in basal content reading.

Fourteen of those I interviewed said they only chose from among the children who volunteered. All fourteen agreed that less proficient readers were probably less likely to volunteer. This appeared to be the case in

content reading in 17 of the 24 classrooms I observed.

Five of the teachers I interviewed said they chose children randomly, but admitted that they were less likely to call upon the less proficient readers because it was embarrassing for the child. Five of the classrooms I observed appeared to follow a somewhat similar process in content classes.

In two classrooms content reading was accomplished in a round robin style, or up one row and down the next. One of the teachers I interviewed said she used this method also.

All together, 19 teachers said they did not assign readings in any specific order and 22 of the classrooms appeared to use random selection. The teachers were asked to agree or disagree with this statement: "If children know which passage they will be asked to read, they will count down to it and practice." All of the 19 teachers who used random selection agreed with this statement, and several said that was the very reason they didn't use round robin reading.

However, only two of those teachers agreed that unrehearsed oral reading is an accurate measure of a child's true reading ability. The remaining teachers agreed with the statement: "Children are more concerned about getting through an oral passage than in constructing meaning from it."

Admittedly, informal interviews and classroom observations hardly constitute empirical data. I was not seeking to obtain quantitative measures, but only to raise

issues about oral reading. The responses and observations were analyzed using the Categorical Analysis Method, which simply means that the content of the notes, responses and observations are organized into whatever categories seem to emerge and are then described narratively. My analysis of the observations and responses gives rise to the following suspicions.

/slide 1/

1) Since non-proficient readers are less likely to be called upon and less likely to volunteer, the children in most need of practice are less likely to receive it.

2) Perceptions of a child's reading proficiency are often based on the child's skill in reading unfamiliar text aloud in public.

3) A child who is reading unfamiliar content material aloud in the presence of peers is often more concerned about getting through the passage than in constructing meaning from it.

4) If children have a chance to practice, they will.

5) Unrehearsed oral reading is often employed and encouraged in classrooms, but does not reflect an authentic reading experience in terms of the reading tasks one is asked to perform in "real life."

Even when teachers do not use unrehearsed oral reading, miscue analyses are also based on the child's cold oral proficiency. *The Reading Miscue Inventory* (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1988) is an evaluation based on oral reading of "an entire story, article or chapter without interruption"

(p. 3). The passage is read aloud and recorded onto audio tape. Normally only the one long reading is coded for miscues. Another widely used analysis is *The Informal Reading Inventory* (Burns and Roe, 1985). This is an evaluation based on oral fluency, silent comprehension and listening comprehension of graded passages. Neither of these instruments contains procedures for analysis of rehearsed oral reading. I would suggest that a more complete picture of the reader is possible when such procedures are employed as part of a complete miscue analysis.

The Value of Rehearsed Reading

I checked the literature for reference to rehearsed reading and found several. In every case, however, rehearsed reading was discussed in the context of reading remediation.

Moffett and Wagner (1983) suggest that theatrical reading be employed in remedial classes. They assert that by studying a text for performance to peers, the child "comes to possess the language in it" (p. 141). Ekwall and Shanker (1988) refer to repeated rereadings as a technique for improving a disabled reader's rate and word recognition. A passage is selected and practiced silently. The child then makes a tape recording of an oral reading of the rehearsed passage and listens to it while timing the passage. The passage is practiced and recorded many times until a rate of 85 words per minute is attained. Then another passage is chosen. Smith and Barrett spoke of

"repeated rereadings" as early as 1979. These are oral presentations of readings which have been rehearsed for performance "with the teacher's help on difficult vocabulary, sentences and concepts" (p. 207).

In each of these resources, the writers suggest rehearsed reading as a way to provide non-proficient readers an opportunity to become deeply involved with text. The approaches are certainly worth adopting, however my concern is not with remediation alone, but with providing authentic reading experiences to all the children in the classroom. I would suggest that good teaching is good teaching regardless of where it happens and who is taught. I would further suggest that these approaches I have just described should be employed by regular teachers in regular classrooms.

Rehearsed Reading for Evaluation

It is not possible to code a child's silent reading, but it is possible to determine something of the child's capabilities by comparing rehearsed and unrehearsed readings. Does the child learn from the text? Does the child make use of reading strategies while reading silently? Is the child capable of presenting a fluent oral reading? Some insights into these questions can be gained when rehearsed and unrehearsed passages are compared.

/slide 2/

Three children provide illustration. Kevin was a non-proficient nine-year old reader. He was enrolled in the Summer Reading Clinic at the University of North Dakota. A miscue analysis was performed on two readings from the same

book. Each passage was approximately 240 words in length. The first was a rehearsed passage which Kevin read silently with the knowledge that he would be recorded for evaluation. The second passage, which immediately followed the first in the book, was recorded without prior rehearsal.

Kevin miscued 15.8 times per hundred words on the unrehearsed passage. He read at a rate of 51 words per minutes. He corrected only 58% of his miscues. He miscued only 4.17 times per hundred words on his rehearsed passage. He read at a rate of 74 words per minute and corrected all but two of his miscues.

Troy was a non-proficient nine-year old reader whom I tutored for a year. He read a short story from *Cricket Magazine*. On the unrehearsed passage he scored 12.75 miscues per hundred words. His rate was 40 words per minute. He corrected 33% of his miscues. Troy's rehearsed passage, from the same short story, was read at 67 words per minute. He miscued 6.8 times per hundred words. He self-corrected 80% of his miscues.

Lisa was a kindergarten student and the subject of a case study. She read two stories from a first grade basal. She miscued 7.2 times per hundred words on an unrehearsed passage. She read at a rate of 33 words per minute and self corrected 65% of her miscues. Her slow rate was attributed to several lengthy pauses.

Lisa's rehearsed passage was read at a rate of 61 words per minute. She miscued only 2.1 times per hundred words and corrected all of her miscues. Her pauses were fewer and

shorter in duration.

It is not surprising that a child will be able to offer a more fluent oral reading after rehearsal. It is suggested, however, that rehearsed reading should be a part of a complete miscue analysis for the purpose of comparative evaluation. Such comparisons can reveal something of a child's abilities which may not be otherwise revealed.

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A page from Troy's transcript will illustrate. The dotted line indicates the point to which Troy rehearsed. Note the sudden upsurge in miscues, many of them omissions. Troy was reluctant to "sound out" a word he did not know, and rather than struggle with it, would simply say "blank" and continue. Only one such omission was subsequently self-corrected in this unrehearsed sample. Note, however, that there are no such omissions in the rehearsed sample. When reading silently, Troy apparently solved the word rather than skipping it and was able to remember what he had learned. Observe also that the few miscues in the unrehearsed passage do not change the meaning of the sentence. The only one that did, in this sample, was self-corrected, and that was a syntactically appropriate error.

All of the passages for the three children presented in this paper were selected from the same book or story. This is the ideal the choice for obtaining the most reliable comparison. Readability formulas may be employed to find to similarly graded passages, if one is satisfied with the

accuracy of such formulas. There is reason to suspect their validity for use in an evaluation of reading skill (Koeneke, 1987). Formulas that rely on syllable count and sentence length have been criticized by many educators for over-simplifying the reading process (Israelite, 1988). Choosing two passages from the same book is highly recommended. It provides a reliable comparison and saves a great deal of unnecessary labor.

Rehearsed Reading in Content Classes

A child can be deeply embarrassed when reading an unfamiliar passage in the presence of peers from a science or social studies text. The practice can also be counter-productive. As mentioned earlier, many of the surveyed teachers believed that children were less interested in constructing meaning from a content passage than in simply getting through it. Many believed that comprehension suffered. Many also believed that children would rehearse the passage they would be assigned if they knew in advance what it would be. Struggling with an unfamiliar passage can only have adverse effects on the child's self-image and attitude toward reading. A few simple practices can improve the situation.

One of the surveyed teachers stated her belief that children should never be expected to read a passage aloud without a chance to look it over first. Her approach was to ask various children to practice a section of the content area text well in advance of the class period. Her fourth graders knew they had the right to decline, but even

less-proficient readers were more willing to accept when opportunity to rehearse was offered. This teacher indicated that she chose children randomly, without regard to their abilities. With practice and help, even her least proficient readers were able to present a clear, fluent oral reading.

Summary and Conclusions

There are few occasions in "real life" when a reader is expected to present an unrehearsed reading in public. Teachers indicated that they used the practice in their classrooms, however. It appears that those children in most need of opportunities to interact with print are the least likely to receive them because they are less frequently called upon to read and less likely to volunteer.

Instruments for evaluating a child's reading rely almost exclusively on unrehearsed oral reading. Consequently, our judgements about a child's reading ability are based principally upon how well the child reads aloud from unfamiliar text in the presence of others. This is an inauthentic experience and often does not accurately reflect the child's silent reading skill. If children are evaluated on their rehearsed reading, as well as on their unrehearsed reading the results can be compared and used to provide a clearer picture of the child's ability to perform authentic reading tasks.

One parting comment: In the area of writing we have come to understand that the old practice of evaluating a child's writing skill based on a first draft is grading an

inauthentic task. Real writers craft and refine their works and seldom make first drafts available to the public. I would suggest that the same philosophy be applied to oral reading. A cold oral reading is essentially a "first draft" and judging a child on his or her ability from this, is a judgement based on an inauthnetic task.

When children are given opportunities to rehearse the readings they will perform, the stigma of disability is removed in large part. The child has the opportunity to perform well in the presence of peers. The benefits in terms of self-image and attitudes toward reading are impossible to measure.

1

Some Issues Concerning Oral Reading

1) Since non-proficient readers are less likely to be called upon and less likely to volunteer, the children in most need of practice are less likely to receive it.

2) Perceptions of a child's reading proficiency are often based on the child's skill in reading unfamiliar text aloud in public.

3) A child who is reading unfamiliar content material aloud in the presence of peers is often more interested in "getting through it" than in constructing meaning from it.

4) If children have a chance to practice they will.

5) Unrehearsed oral reading is often employed and encouraged in classrooms but does not reflect an authentic reading experience in terms of the reading tasks one is normally asked to perform in "real life."

2

Comparisons of Rehearsed and Unrehearsed Readings

	Unrehearsed Passage	Rehearsed Passage
Kevin		
Miscues/100 words	15.8	4.7
Reading Rate	51 wpm	74 wpm
Self-correction	58%	80%
Troy		
Miscues/100 words	12.75	6.8
Reading Rate	40 wpm	67 wpm
Self-correction	33%	80%
Lisa		
Miscues/100 words	7.2	2.1
Reading Rate	33 wpm	61 wpm
Self-correction	65%	100%

2008 going to do tomorrow, or next week, or when-
2009 ever he had the chance!
2010 Someday, Big-Mouth said, he would capture
2011 a unicorn and bring it back alive. Of course
2012 nobody in the village had ever seen a unicorn.
2013 Several people said there was no such thing.
2014 But Big-Mouth said, "Well, if there is a unicorn,
2015 I will get him. Wait and see!"
2016 Some day, Big-Mouth said, he would travel to
2017 the Mountain of Gold and bring home enough
2018 treasure to make everyone in the village rich
2019 forever. "What Mountain of Gold?" asked the
2020 schoolteacher.

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2020 But Big-Mouth said, "Well, if
2101 there is a Mountain of Gold, I'll bring half of it
2102 home. Wait and see!"
2103 And some day, Big-Mouth said, he would
2104 fight the giant who lived in the Wrestling
2105 Wood and make him cry for mercy. "If there
2106 is a giant," he said, "I'll send him running for
2107 cover. Wait and see!"
2108 But there was a giant, and that's the truth of it.
2109 He was not the largest giant in the world.
2110 And he wasn't the strongest. He wasn't even
2111 the stupidest - not quite. He was just a
2112 middling giant - middling strong, middling
2113 stupid, and unpleasant enough.

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